

Seattle Women's Commission (SWC) Breastfeeding Fact Sheet

- SWC has focused on addressing infant mortality for those communities disproportionately affected. Working with community partners such as the breastfeeding coalition of WA and the Equal Start Community Coalition we identified breastfeeding as an area in which to focus.
- In mid-year 2011 the US Surgeon General issues a call to action to support breastfeeding, this report cited research that shows that only 43% of American's believe a mother should breastfeed in public. This research also cited restaurant managers, etc., who report they routinely ask breastfeeding mothers to leave, move or cover up. The mothers feel embarrassed and harassed and cite this as a cause to stop breastfeeding. This proposed legislation is supporting this federal call to action, specifically by working on a community identified issue. (<http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/topics/breastfeeding/calltoactiontosupportbreastfeeding.pdf> see pg. 13).
- American Indians/Alaska Natives and African American women experience disproportionately high rates of infant mortality in at two and three times the rate of white women in Seattle. Breastfeeding is shown to reduce rates of infant mortality (SIDS), however by age 6 months only 13% of women are still breastfeeding. Breastfeeding has also been shown to reduce rates of obesity, diabetes and improve brain function just to cite a few additional benefits.
- In consulting with the WA Breastfeeding Coalition they shared the experiences of women who had experienced discrimination in public places such as restaurants, coffee shops and grocery stores. This was further expressed at the "The Liz Thomas Legacy Policy Summit to Eliminate Racial Disparities in Infant Mortality" where the goal to establish family friendly policies around breastfeeding was articulated. (see attached report pgs. 13-14, SWC was a member of the planning)
- The state has anti-discrimination breastfeeding law in place but many women didn't know about it or how to file complaints. The WA Human Rights Commission (who enforces this law) suggested local enforcement would benefit those who were not aware of these laws and further support and protect them from discrimination. With the state budget cuts they have not been able to focus on outreach and education relating to this law.
- The proposed legislation would add breast feeding women to a class protected from discrimination in public accommodations. They would not be able to be told to leave, cover up or move to a secluded place to breastfeed.
- As part of their normal activities, SOCR will provide info on this at their tabling events and trainings. This provides a much needed educational piece for the public and those operating public spaces.

http://www.breastfeedingwa.org/files/winter2011_0.pdf.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General; 2011.